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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
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"Saying it like it is!"

Another long and tiring week; I must be getting old[er]!! However, the weather has made it bearable, although I was really too tired to enjoy it!

Even though I don't have the energy to do it, I'm going to make a few of the comments I mentioned a couple of weeks ago. A promise is a promise!

In that issue, there was an article pertaining to how spam e-mail is doing damage to the environment. No, of course not, directly. But the energy used to send and read it via your computer generates carbon dioxide, which is partially the cause of our problems. Well, I started to think about that - for a couple of minutes anyway. Why stop at singling out spam? How about other e-mail that one gets? You know the ones I mean. Those messages from your friends with useless factoids. How about those useless, yet well-meaning chain e-mails? You know the ones: here's a little story that will cheer you up; send it to ten friends and you'll have a better life, and such. Or how about the e-mails that have been passed along to everyone every couple of years ago - send this letter to all of your contacts and Microsoft will send you \$25.00 for doing so! How about the "you're un-American if you don't send this "Support the troops" message to everyone you know!" How about all of the activity generated by all of the porn sites that inundate the internet (speaking of what I think is out there and not what I've [not] seen personally)? The list can go on forever! Get rid of all that crap and we can save the environment for another couple of generations!

The other thing that caused me to do a little thinking this week is the recent outbreak of swine flu. Not, not the disease itself, but the "other disease" that's been spawned. How anyone can use a potentially deadly disease as the basis for spam or phishing schemes is beyond me. Taking advantage of people's fears has to be one of the lowest forms of cruel and deceitful behavior! Just one more event that led to emotional terrorism.

I could go on, but it's getting late, and this issue has a deadline. So, let's get on to the other news and comments for this week; and we'll see what happens in the coming weeks!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, another week has come and gone, and we've have some fairly interesting developments in the world of politics, and you know me... I can't pass this stuff up. Add to that the fact that there is an ongoing paucity of posts in the NewsGroups, and you KNOW that I'm going to be talking about.

First of all, I want to share with you a couple of comments I got about last week's column. First, someone emailed me to say that I was all wrong about Senator Larry Craig, since he has said publicly many times that he is not gay. Well, dear reader, that may be true. Senator Craig my NOT be gay. Unfortunately, he was in an airport bathroom looking for some one who IS.

The second comment was about my view of Minnesota's congresswoman, Michele Bachmann. The only comment the respondent had was that her name was spelled 'Michele' and not 'Michelle' as I had typed it. Ok. Mea culpa.

Now, THIS week, we have some really interesting stuff. U.S. Supreme Court Justice David Souter announced that he's stepping down. I can remember when the first President Bush nominated Souter. "Oh NO!" most liberals cried, "He's FAR to conservative!"

Well, first of all. Something told me that he was more of a thinker than a drum-beater. He's one of those old, New England types who's very quiet and gives the impression (which may well be true in his case) of being very prim and proper. He's always struck me as what a Supreme Court Justice should be: A learned thinker who will speak his mind and take his stand without needing a three-ring circus around him to do it.

I found it amusing that this guy had been nominated by George "Read My Lips" Bush, and I still liked him. After I got over the initial shock of that, I realized that he was going to be an interesting, if quiet, Justice. A look at his record shows that I was right.

Let's move on to Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter. I'll tell you right from the start that I've never been crazy about Senator Specter. I've got enormous respect for him, but he's stood against some things that I've thought were important, and for some things that I thought were the wrong way to go. He's a savvy politician, and HAS put through some good and worthwhile legislation, and he should be recognized and applauded for that. The reason he's "jumped parties" is precisely because he knows that doing his job has made it impossible to KEEP doing his job. He didn't jump parties because he agrees with more of the Democratic Party's agenda than the Republican Party's, he jumped because he stood no chance of remaining a Senator if he didn't.

In one discussion I had, someone said, "But if he can't pass the primary, he doesn't deserve to be a Senator".

That's 'kind of true', but the good Senator probably saw the way things would play out... his own party machinery would be used against him, with

all its money and influence. They'd find some guy who they felt would be easier to control and count on, shovel money into his campaign coffers, and let Specter try to fight against it in the primary.

Now that he's "jumped ship", the Republicans can put up whoever they want, and Specter will get the campaign funds and platform and airtime that he needs and deserves. He knows he'll have to face an opponent sooner or later, he just probably felt he deserved to have it happen on a level playing field. Strange, huh?

For the Democrats who are thinking that this gets them closer to a filibuster-proof congress, don't get your hopes up. Senator Specter has proven time and time again that he's his own man, usually at the most inconvenient time. That's okay. THAT I can respect. And anything that keeps Senator Specter in the Senate IS a good thing. Whether I agree with him or not, I think he's a good Senator. Now, if we can just get Senators Collins and Snowe away from the dark side... [grin]

Okay, last topic for me for this week... North Carolina Congresswoman Virginia Foxx.

This woman has caught my eye before. She's... not a pip.. a 'pip' is someone who I find inept in an AMUSING way. She is not. She is inept in a very basic and troubling, very hurtful way.

This past week, she stood on the House floor and, while sitting/standing across from Matthew Shepherd's mother, said: "I also would like to point out that there was a bill -- the hate crimes bill that's called the Matthew Shepard bill is named after a very unfortunate incident that happened where a young man was killed, but we know that that young man was killed in the commitment of a robbery. It wasn't because he was gay....This -- the bill was named for him, hate crimes bill was named for him, but it's really a hoax that that continues to be used as an excuse for passing these bills."

Lady, you should be ashamed of yourself! Her 'excuse' was just as pathetic. She said that she apologized IF some people found her 'mistake' painful.

Painful or not Ginny, you owe Mrs. Shepherd an apology... and not just for being the wrong about the reason her son died... they, beat him, pistol-whipped him, violated him in the most terrible ways imaginable, tied him to a friggin' fencepost and threw rocks at his head until he died... and you owe not only his mother an apology, but you owe one to HIM. And it's not a case of "IF" it hurt anyone, you owe an apology for being wrong and using your 'power'... the voice of the United States government... to make a comment as self-serving and as hateful as that. I would have thought that if you were going to buck conventional wisdom, you'd at least read the court transcripts or find some other way to be sure you knew what you were talking about. Shouldn't you be apologizing for using the situation to make your twisted and incredibly off-point statement in the first place? For daring to use the death of a young man... who's mother was sitting right the hell across from you, no less... as a talking point in your stupid little agenda and getting it freakin' wrong anyway? You disgust me. Right now I'd like to beat you WITH Michele Bachmann (Ha! Spelled it right this time!)

Well, that's all for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Fallujah' Game Gets Pulled!  
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                                     Focus of Games: Recession!  
                                     Atari Is Atari Again!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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## Company Pulls Plug on 'Fallujah' Video Game

The publisher behind a video game based on one of the Iraq war's fiercest battles has pulled the plug on the title, called "Six Days in Fallujah."

A spokeswoman for Japanese game company Konami Digital Entertainment Inc. confirmed that the company is no longer publishing the game, which was set to go on sale next year.

The game sought to re-create the 2004 Fallujah battle from the perspective of a U.S. Marine fighting against insurgents. It was developed by Atomic Games with input from the Marines.

Konami had advertised "Six Days" as a shooting game "unlike any other," combining "authentic weaponry, missions and combat set against the gripping story of the U.S. Marines on the ground." The game was criticized by veterans groups and others who called it inappropriate.

## Recession Is Latest Focus of Games for Change

With the recession impacting college students, MTV's college network mtvU is turning to one medium it knows will get attention to help teach students to cope with tough financial times - a video game.

mtvU has joined with the Peter G. Peterson Foundation's Indebted Campaign to launch the online video game "Debt Ski," which was designed by a university graduate and developed by Persuasive Games that specializes in video games with an opinion.

In the game players guide a pig, Piggy Banks, on a jet ski through various obstacles to maximize his savings, limit his debt and keep him happy while buying food, housing and other items, with the aim of

teaching players how to identify and manage debt.

Banks has the choice to buy the latest electronics and clothing which can make him happy - but plunge him into debt. Spending tsunamis, such as unexpected medical bills or increases to the cost of living, can hit him along the way.

When players lose, they get debt management information.

"Arguably, the economic crisis is one of the biggest challenges facing this generation," said Ross Martin of MTV360.

"College students are dealing with a broad range of issues from rising tuition to entering one of the most daunting job markets in recent history. Students don't sit on the sidelines, they take action -- they become the creative engine driving social change."

"Debt Ski" is the third in a line of games sponsored by mtvU that deal with serious world issues, with previous games focused on Darfur refugees - "Darfur is Dying" - and HIV positive patients - "Pos or Not?"

The Peter G. Peterson Foundation was founded last year by the chairman emeritus of The Blackstone Group with a commitment of \$1 billion to increase public awareness and action on the nature and urgency of key fiscal challenges threatening America.

Its Indebted Campaign seeks to educate students about their debts as well as the growing federal debt.

The foundation's president and CEO Dave Walker said there was strong appeal to using a video game as a messenger as college students spend a major portion of their day in front of computer.

"Young people, who are arguably the most important audience to reach these days when it comes to inspiring social change, are hard to reach through traditional media," said Walker.

The game was designed by 26-year-old Lehigh University graduate Brian Haveri who won a contest to come up with a video game to promote the messages of the Indebted Campaign.

Haveri won \$10,000 and students are being encouraged to play "Debt Ski" with a prize of \$250 a week on offer through June.

"Early data shows that there are high replay numbers, which means the audience is spending time on the site and playing the game multiple times - increasing the odds that the core messages are coming through and have the potential to make an impact," said Martin.

Over the next few months, the Indebted Campaign is aiming to expand the ways it puts out its message, such as exploring the iPhone as a new way to reach gamers.

The Foundation has also partnered with New York-design school Parsons The New School and the National Association of Public Administration to create "Budgetball" that teaches students the trade-offs involved in responsible budgeting.

"Learning about social challenges through games is a great way to help you visualize the extent of the problem and the impact of possible



Many of today's players may only experience Atari games in emulation. Indeed, many of my students may have little to no memory of CRT televisions at all. Given such factors, it seems even more important to improve the graphical accuracy of tools like Stella.

In Spring 2009, I tasked a Georgia Tech Computer Science capstone group to modify Stella, adding settings to simulate the CRT behaviors described above. The group consisted of five committed and talented CS seniors: Edward Booth, Michael Cook, Justin Dobbs, Will Rowland, and Prince Yang.

Despite being mighty impressive, the results in a live game are far more remarkable. Edward and his colleagues have done a fantastic job.

They are currently working with the maintainer of the free, open-source Stella emulator to patch their changes into the main build, where the effects will be available as a configurable option. Expect to see it there shortly, where hopefully it will benefit players, creators, educators, and archivists alike. Given that we'll be placing the code back into Stella's repository, I'm also hopeful that this software might be extended for use in other emulators for computer systems that used televisions as their primary output.

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A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

FTC Says Internet Firms Near "Last Chance"

Companies that track consumer behavior on the Web for targeted advertising without proper consent are near their "last chance" to self-regulate, the head of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission said on Monday.

Privacy advocates say regulations on big phone and Internet companies, such as AT&T Inc and Google Inc, are too lax, giving the firms excessive control over consumers' personal information.

"From my perspective, the industry is pretty close to its last clear chance to demonstrate" that it can police itself, FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz told the Reuters Global Financial Regulation Summit in Washington.

Earlier this year, the FTC issued new guidance urging websites to tell consumers that data is being collected during their searches and to allow them to opt out.

If companies fail to do a better job of making their privacy policies understandable to the average person, momentum will keep building for greater regulation, Leibowitz said. "It's really up to industry."



## EU Says Microsoft Seeks Hearing in Antitrust Case

Microsoft is seeking a hearing from EU antitrust regulators in its defence against accusations of unfairly crushing rivals in the web browser market, the European Commission said Wednesday.

The commission, Europe's top competition watchdog, opened a new front in its epic antitrust battle with Microsoft in January, hitting the company with fresh charges of unfairly squashing competition.

A commission spokesman said that Microsoft had formally responded to the charges late Tuesday and had requested the hearing, which companies are allowed to do as part of their defence under EU antitrust rules.

If Microsoft fails to beat back the charges, the commission could slap the company with huge new fines and order it to change its ways.

The commission accuses Microsoft of crushing rivals by bundling its Internet Explorer web browser into its ubiquitous Windows personal computer operating system, giving the programme a huge advantage over competitors' browsers.

The European Commission and Microsoft have long clashed over the US company's practice of bundling other software such as media players into Windows.

In September 2007, Microsoft lost an appeal before Europe's second-highest court against a fine of nearly 500 million euros (661 million dollars) that EU regulators slapped on the company in 2004 for abusing its dominant power, partly in the media players market.

In February 2008, the commission hit Microsoft with a further fine of 899 million euros for defying its 2004 ruling.

## US Cyber Warfare Needs Oversight, Debate

Shrouded in secrecy, the U.S. government's policies on how and when to wage cyber warfare are ill-formed, lack adequate oversight and require a broad public debate, a new report by the National Research Council says.

The report warns that the "undeveloped and uncertain nature" of the government's cyber warfare policies could lead to them being used hastily and ill-advisedly during a crisis. That danger is compounded by secrecy and lack of oversight, the report's authors cautioned on Wednesday.

"Unsound policy formulated and implemented during crisis may prove difficult to change or reverse when the crisis has passed," concludes the report, the first to take a comprehensive look at American cyber war capabilities. The research council is the working arm of the National Academy of Sciences.

The U.S. government has spoken only broadly about cyber warfare in the

past, noting its value as a national security tool. Officials routinely refuse to talk about computer attacks America has launched.

The 322-page report, prepared by an independent panel of academics and cyber security experts, comes as the Obama administration is on the verge of releasing its own review of the nation's cyber security.

That review, however, is expected to focus largely on defensive and administrative measures, including who will lead the nation's cyber effort, and how the government can better manage and use technology to protect everything from the electrical grid to the stock market.

Officials have warned in recent months that the nation's computer and internet networks are at risk and are repeatedly probed by foreign governments, criminals or other groups.

U.S. offensive cyber war options could range from a more passive cyber intrusion such as listening in on a foe's communications to an attack that cripples an enemy's air defense systems to clear the way for a bomber attack.

A key challenge, however, may be determining who the enemy is, particularly if U.S. officials are considering a response to a cyber attack or intrusion against America.

Conducted from hundreds or thousands of miles away, a cyber attack can be over in a millisecond, with the press of a button. The perpetrator can be a single hacker looking to do mischief, a terrorist seeking to kill thousands, or a nation aiming to cripple the U.S. economy.

The council emphasized its call for greater public debate on the government's plans for cyber warfare, which to date has been clandestine. The council likened the need for further public airings to the debates that accompanied the use and testing of nuclear weapons more than 50 years ago.

"There needs to be a national debate, just as there was in the 1950s about nuclear weapons," said Kenneth W. Dam, co-chairman of the committee on offensive information warfare that put together the report. "The problem is, there is no national decision-making apparatus."

Earlier this month, Air Force Gen. Kevin Chilton, who heads U.S. Strategic Command, told reporters that the military has rules and procedures for cyber warfare, just as it does for armed conflict. He then declined to provide details, adding: "A good defense also depends on a good offense."

The Research Council's report warned that such secrecy surrounding the government's exploration of cyber warfare has "impeded widespread understanding and debate about the nature and implications of U.S. cyber attack."

It said that while the U.S. has highly developed and sophisticated capabilities to launch a cyber attack, it is difficult to determine the outcome of such a move compared to a traditional armed assault.

So far, said study director Herbert Lin, Americans have been focused more on defensive digital maneuvers - building firewalls, using anti-virus and other protective software and implementing safety procedures, such as the Pentagon's recent ban on the use of external

computer flash drives.

Those efforts are important, he said. But he added that the U.S. cannot just continue to build bigger walls, particularly as cyber attacks grow and become increasingly easier to execute.

In its final recommendations, the report said the U.S. government must develop a clear decision-making process for cyber actions, require periodic accounting of cyber attacks at least in a classified form to those charged with oversight, and work with other nations around the world to establish a better legal and ethical framework for such attacks.

### Beware Swine Flu Spam

Swine flu spam is spreading like a virus of its own and recently turned malicious.

Spam campaigns often start with harmless e-mail messages and slowly build into more serious threats, according to Stephan Chenette, manager of security research at Websense Inc.

"Spammers are generally very well connected with each other and see how well it's working. It always goes through the test phase," he said.

They test campaigns with less threatening approaches, share feedback between each other, figure out what works and what doesn't and then launch increasingly harmful attacks, he explained. "

"By us seeing they've increased the number of e-mails that are going out surrounding the swine flu, it indicates that so far it's been a very successful campaign," he said.

Websense has been tracking this latest trend, which has grown in the past week. The number of e-mail messages with subject lines related to Swine Flu is in the tens of thousands, according to Chenette.

The trend started off with traditional medical spam - or medspam - that didn't necessarily scam users, he said. "They were enticing the users by scaring them, but there were no malicious attachments."

Then the spam evolved into money-making schemes, with spammers trying to sell pharmaceuticals, medical devices and PDFs that contain generic information on the swine flu for \$20 to \$30, he explained.

"Medspam has always been something that spammers have used for making money and the fact that there's a flu-type symptom that allows them to sell their story in a more convincing way has been good for spammers," he said. "

The first swine flu e-mail with a malicious attachment surfaced this week. Symantec Security Response analyzed the file, which poses as a PDF document of Swine Influenza FAQs.

"When users attempt to access the PDF file, malcode within the PDF attempts to exploit an old Adobe vulnerability (BID 33751) in order to drop malware on the local computer," said a Symantec report.

Symantec detects the malicious PDF as Bloodhound.Exploit.6 and the dropped file contained in the PDF as InfoStealer, a trojan. Symantec rates it a Level 1 threat - on the low end of the scale.

Users that follow typical best practices don't have much to worry about, said Marc Fossi, manager of Symantec Security Response.

A patch from Adobe has been available for some time now, antivirus software would detect the threat if it attempted installation and anti-spam software might stop the e-mail in the first place, he explained.

"There's actually nothing overly unique about it. We've seen malicious code using this sort of technique fairly commonly ... the social engineering aspect is the real standout here," said Fossi.

Current events are great triggers for spam and phishing campaigns, said James Quin, senior research analyst at Info-Tech Research Group Inc.

While the underlying malware in the Swine Flu FAQ e-mail is inconsequential, the technique used to get the malware into end machines is interesting, he said.

"What makes this one stand out is the same type of techniques that phishers use are now being used for malware," said Quin.

But the malicious e-mail doesn't surprise Chenette. "There's going to be more malicious attachments and exploits and various kinds of malicious executables attached to these e-mails going out," he said.

A similar pattern occurred during the SARS outbreak in early 2000, according to Chenette. SARS-related spam led to malicious executables attached to the e-mails, so that's the direction Websense sees spammers going with the Swine Flu, he said.

Attaching malware to spam isn't typical anymore, according to Chenxi Wang, principal analyst in Security and Risk Management at Forrester Research Inc.

"In the old days, when spam first came into existence, they carried malicious attachments," she said. But as companies "became smarter" and started disallowing e-mail attachments, spammers stopped adding malicious attachments to their e-mails, she explained.

It's more common for spammers to put URLs in spam messages and entice people to click on them, sending them to a Web site that may carry malware or the Web site may link to another site that carries malware, she said.

"I don't know how successful attaching malware straight in an e-mail would be because unless the malware is very polymorphic ... it's pretty easy to be detected by antivirus software," said Wang.

Wang also doesn't consider the malicious e-mail attachment a sign that spammer techniques are changing. "You will still see spam with embedded URLs versus those with malicious attachments," she said.

While it's hard to say whether spam related to the swine flu will continue to grow, Fossi said it wouldn't surprise him. Symantec saw the same pattern occur during the U.S. presidential election and last fall

with the economic crises.

Spammers often work with themes, which could include sporting events like the Olympics, but themes that induce fear are often the most successful, according to Chenette.

"Spammers are heavily making use of the theme around the swine flu because there is a big scare. Whenever they are able to scare users, the likelihood of it being successful greatly increases as opposed to sporting events," he said.

But the amount of spam circulating around the swine flu isn't unusual for a major event, according to Wang. "I think it's average in terms of scale," she said.

"We've seen inauguration spam when Barack Obama took office and we saw things like Twitter spam when Twitter became popular," she said

#### Cablevision Has Fastest Internet Speeds for Cable

Cablevision Systems Corp. on Tuesday unveiled the fastest Internet speeds available from any cable or phone company.

Starting May 11, the Bethpage, N.Y.-based cable operator will offer speeds of up to 101 megabits per second downstream throughout its service area, and 15 megabits per second upstream.

That means a 4-gigabyte, high-definition movie can be downloaded in 5 1/2 minutes. It would take two minutes for a 1.6-gigabyte standard definition movie.

Cablevision, which has 3 million subscribers in the New York metro area, also plans to double the downstream speed of the Wi-Fi Internet service it offers at "hot spots" in New York's Long Island, Connecticut and Westchester County, and in parts of New Jersey.

Cablevision is in a race against Verizon Communications Inc., which is rolling out its fiber-optic FiOS service in New York City.

At present, Verizon's top Internet speed is 50 megabits per second with a starting cost of \$140 a month plus a free wireless router. Cablevision is offering its service at \$99.95 a month.

The second-fastest Internet speed offered by a cable operator is up to 60 megabits from Charter Communications Inc., available only in the St. Louis area. Charter, based in St. Louis, is in Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

Philadelphia-based Comcast Corp. offers speeds of up to 50 megabits per second.

#### HP Unveils ProBook Laptop Line

Hewlett-Packard Co, the world's top PC maker, is launching a new line of

inexpensive business laptops with fresh features targeting users at small and medium-size companies.

The HP ProBook s-series, which starts shipping globally on Tuesday, is the company's new mainstream business notebook, following the release of its higher-end, lightweight EliteBook line last year.

The ProBook replaces the HP Compaq line, although the Compaq name will continue to be used as a master brand name in other PCs.

The ProBook offers users a number of new features, including an optional Linux-based operating system pre-installed - Novell Inc's SuSE Linux Enterprise Desktop 11 - for those seeking an alternative to the dominant Microsoft Corp Windows platform.

It is HP's first-ever Linux pre-install on a standard business laptop, the company said. The PC maker does offer some netbooks with Linux.

"It's pretty much a natural evolution," said Carol Hess- Nickels, HP's director of marketing for worldwide business notebooks.

"We want to provide a different option ... it's probably a little time yet before we'll know exactly what the demand is, but we did think it was something worth trying."

The ProBooks come with 14-inch, 15.6-inch and 17.3-inch screen sizes, with prices starting at \$529. In another first for an HP business notebook, buyers will be able to add a color finish - "merlot" - if they choose.

Some models will also feature Qualcomm Inc's Gobi technology, allowing them to use a single module to access different mobile broadband network technologies and mobile operators.

HP will also bring higher-end durability features, like its 3D DriveGuard - which protects the hard drive if a laptop is dropped - and a spill-resistant keyboard to the ProBook.

HP is the world's No. 1 PC vendor, with a first-quarter global market share of more than 20 percent, according to research house IDC, well ahead of second-place Dell Inc. HP also took over the top spot in the U.S. market from Dell in the first quarter.

#### Mozilla Releases Firefox 3.5 Beta 4

Mozilla on Tuesday released Firefox 3.5 beta 4, a release that promises improvements to performance, web compatibility, and speed.

It is now available for Windows, Mac OS X, and Linux via an online download.

Beta 4 is based on the Gecko 1.9.1 Web-page layout rendering engine. Improvements to Gecko include speculative parsing for faster content rendering, Mozilla said.

The release also adds six additional languages, bringing the total to 70.

Mozilla championed the inclusion of the browser's Private Browsing Mode and TraceMonkey JavaScript engine, though both features were available in beta 3.

Mozilla released Firefox 3.5 beta 3 in early March, changing the official title from Firefox 3.1 to Firefox 3.5.

Beta 4 also includes location-based browsing using geolocation, support for native JSON and web worker threads, and support for new web technologies such as: HTML5 and elements, downloadable fonts and other new CSS properties, JavaScript query selectors, HTML5 offline data storage for applications, and SVG transforms.

Mozilla warned that the release is still for testing purposes.

"Firefox 3.5 Beta 4 is a public preview release intended for developer testing and community feedback," the company wrote in a blog post. "We recommend that you read the release notes and known issues before installing this beta."

#### Windows 7 To Make Public Debut May 5

Microsoft said Thursday that a nearly-final version of its next-generation Windows 7 operating system will be publicly released on May 5.

The release will be available at [microsoft.com/downloads](http://microsoft.com/downloads) in a move intended to signal that the software giant is putting finishing touches on an operating system that it hopes will escape criticism heaped on its predecessor Vista.

"Listening to our partners and customers has been fundamental to the development of Windows 7," said Bill Veghte, senior vice president for the Windows business at Microsoft.

"We heard them and worked hard to deliver the highest quality release candidate in the history of Windows."

The Windows 7 release candidate (RC) was made available to developers on Thursday.

The release indicates that little is likely to be changed in the final version of Windows 7 and that companies can begin tailoring software or hardware to the operating system, according to Microsoft.

Touted features include compatibility with touch-screen computer controls and with software designed to work with earlier-generation Windows XP operating system.

Critics lambasted Vista for being too complex and not being compatible with older software programs.

Windows XP holdouts are being told they will have to upgrade to Vista to make a transition to Windows 7.

"Windows 7 shows significant promise," Forrester Research analyst Ben Gray wrote in an independent report on the operating system. "Start

preparing for it now, and the best way to prepare for Windows 7 is by deploying Windows Vista."

#### Windows 7 To Launch on October 23

A report by Pocket-Lint.com quotes an Acer executive as saying that Windows 7 will launch on Oct. 23.

Acer America representatives could not be reached for comment by press time. A Microsoft spokesman said that the company has not changed its public plan of record, as far as the launch timing of Windows 7 is concerned.

"23rd October is the date the Windows 7 will be available. There is a 30 day upgrade time so that customers don't wait to buy a new computer, so if you buy during that 30 day period, you'll get a free upgrade to Windows 7", Bobby Watkins, Acer's UK managing director told Pocket-lint.

A Microsoft spokesman did not confirm or deny Pocket-lint.com's report.

"On 30 April we made the Release Candidate (RC) of Windows 7 available for download to MSDN and TechNet subscribers," a spokesman said in an email. "Windows 7 Release Candidate is a major business and engineering milestone, and indicates that the operating system is entering the final phases of development. Windows 7 RC is the result of feedback from millions of customers and partners around the world, and is ready for partners to develop and test applications, device drivers and services. As we have said for some time, we are committed to making Windows 7 available within three years of the General Availability of Windows Vista."

Windows Vista for businesses launched on Nov. 30, 2006, while Microsoft's consumer version launched in January of 2007.

#### Opera Browser Turns 15

It's hard to believe, but Norwegian browser Opera is celebrating its 15th birthday today.

Jon von Tetzchner, Opera's current CEO, and Geir Ivarsøy first developed the browser back in late April 1994.

"Geir and I knew the Web would forever change how people live, work and play - the Web browser would be the tool to enable that transformation," von Tetzchner said in a statement. "Today, I am humbled by what our company, together with the worldwide community of Opera users, has achieved. In the next 15 years, billions of people will join the Web. I am confident we will give them even more reasons to choose Opera. Everyone deserves a good browser, regardless of how or where they connect to the Web."

According to the company, some 40 million people across the world use the browser on their PCs. The company is celebrating the birthday on its site with the "top 15 reasons to use Opera."



## Is Anyone Using Internet Explorer?

GigaOM reports that a new survey of the most used applications on Windows puts Firefox at the top, followed by Google's Chrome browser. Internet Explorer trailed at #3. And among the youngest users, IE did even worse.

The survey, by Wakoopa, includes the most used applications on Windows, Mac and the Web. It is based on the activity of 75,000 participating users.

Firefox also came out on top among Mac users. On the Web, Facebook was #1, but Google took four of the top 10 slots. Gmail was #2. The survey also shows that younger users prefer Firefox over IE by a larger margin.

For more details, check out the Top Ranking Applications chart at GigaOM.

## New Twitter Users Say Tweet-Tweet, Goodbye

Oprah Winfrey may have marked a tipping point boosting Twitter. But new research from Nielsen shows that although new tweeters are signing up in droves and driving triple-digit monthly membership gains, fewer are continuing to tweet.

David Martin, vice president of primary research for Nielsen Online, noted some of the high-profile media attention Twitter has received recently: Oprah embarrassed herself on Twitter with a stuck caps-lock key. An actor competed with a major news network to see who could gain one million followers first. And TV-show host Jon Stewart shook an angry fist at Twitter.

Indeed, the media hype surrounding Twitter continues as more celebrities sign on, more news outlets sign up, and more everyday Joes get on the tweeting bandwagon to follow their favorite stars and shows. But despite the hockey-stick growth chart, Martin said Twitter faces an uphill battle in making sure these flocks of new users return to the nest.

According to Nielsen Online, more than 60 percent of Twitter users fail to return the following month. Put another way, Twitter's audience retention rate - the percentage of a given month's users who come back the following month - is about 40 percent. For most of the past 12 months, pre-Oprah, Twitter has languished below 30 percent retention.

"By plotting the minimum retention rates for different Internet audience sizes, it is clear that a retention rate of 40 percent will limit a site's growth to about a 10 percent figure," Martin said. "To be clear, a high retention rate doesn't guarantee a massive audience, but it is a prerequisite. There simply aren't enough new users to make up for defecting ones after a certain point."

Some might think Martin jumped the gun with his analysis. After all, Twitter is still an upstart and other sites that lived up to Twitter-like hype suffered from poor retention in the early days, didn't

they? To answer that question and put things into perspective, Martin compared the Twitter phenomenon to two other social-networking darlings, MySpace and Facebook, when they were gaining momentum.

Martin's conclusion: Even when Facebook and MySpace were emerging networks like Twitter is now, their retention rates were twice as high. When they went through their explosive growth phases, retention went up, and both sit at nearly 70 percent today.

"Twitter has enjoyed a nice ride over the last few months, but it will not be able to sustain its meteoric rise without establishing a higher level of user loyalty," Martin said. "Frankly, if Oprah can't accomplish that, I'm not sure who can."

Greg Sterling, principal analyst at Sterling Market Intelligence, agreed that the 40 percent retention rate is a troubling statistic for Twitter. The retention rate, he suggested, may suggest that lots of people are hearing about Twitter and test-driving the micro-blogging site but not finding real value there.

"As Twitter usage continues to grow, I would expect that people will start to see more value - as an information resource and communication tool - and retention will improve," Sterling said. "But if this 'quitter' trend persists over the next 12 months, it will require Twitter to address the issue."

#### McAfee Launches Cybercrime Self-help Site

Antivirus software maker McAfee today launched a new Web site intended to provide advice and services to those who suspect they may be victims of cybercrime.

The Cybercrime Response Unit site starts out with a risk assessment questionnaire, with questions such as "There are unexplained charges or suspicious activity on one or more of my financial accounts," "I opened an attachment to an email and am now concerned that it might have been malicious," and "I am worried that my child or I have encountered an Internet predator."

Ticking checkboxes next to various questions will take you to pages that provide advice and links for dealing with ID Theft, which includes fraud reporting phone numbers for major banks. The help page for malware infections includes a link to a free "Cybercrime scanner" that will scan your PC for malware, unauthorized network connections and other risks (using Internet Explorer), and there's also a short page on dealing with cyber-bullies or online predators.

You'll find the expected occasional plug for a McAfee service or software, along with pages of decent, basic advice such as "Do not open messages or click on links from unknown users in your instant messaging program." There are a good number links to external sites and services, particularly for dealing with ID theft, but some surprising lacks. I didn't see any links to [annualcreditreport.com](http://annualcreditreport.com) under recommendations to check your credit reports regularly, for instance.

Speaking of plugs, if you're interested in some tips on free security tools and services, here's my own list of best practices for protecting

yourself against online threats.

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